



Chapter Three

ALTERNATIVES

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present alternative approaches to the management of the National Area that would promote its stated purpose, maintain its significance, and that would be consistent with legislation and policy. This discussion includes

- how the NPS arrived at the final set of alternatives
- the concepts behind the alternatives
- the types of management units considered
- how the units are applied in the alternatives
- other alternatives considered
- cost considerations
- a summary comparison

The General Management Plan for the National Area would consist of one of the “action” alternatives, together with the elements of required management.

Development of Alternatives

Three preliminary alternatives were presented to the public in a newsletter and in meetings near the National Area. Considerations underlying these preliminary alternatives included the purpose of the National Area as stated in its establishing legislation, the National Area’s resources, the special directions Congress gave regarding management and the concerns of the public and NPS.

Discussion of the preliminary alternatives with the public resulted in eliminating one of the three from further analysis. Reasoning focused on the relatively high degree of development thought inappropriate for the National Area. This alternative is described briefly in the discussion of other alternatives considered.

Public comment also brought about changes in management units and how they were applied. The most natural type of management unit became focused on the gorge exclusively; and of the two management unit types that allowed the most use and development, one was eliminated and one was scaled back. These changes are

also described in the discussion of other alternatives considered.

Alternative Concepts

The concept behind an alternative represents the basic idea of that alternative. It provides guidance for identifying management unit locations in the development of the alternatives and would provide a management perspective.

Alternative A Concept

The National Area would be known for offering rustic, off-the-beaten-track experiences in natural surroundings. Facilities and other conveniences would be available only in a small percentage of the National Area. Many visitors would be attracted to the individual challenge of the area, and many others would join guided float trips and pack trips.

Alternative B Concept

The National Area would be known for its variety of opportunities provided by a mix of facilities and natural environment. Facilities would provide for active and convenient participation in a variety of resource compatible activities. Visitors would be largely attracted to the opportunities for recreation, which would include activities suitable in a primitive setting.

No-Action Alternative Concept

In contrast to Alternatives A and B, the No-Action alternative lacks a formally stated concept. Included by requirement, the “no-action” alternative is essentially a description of current conditions. It permits comparisons between existing conditions and the other alternatives.

Management Units

Management units are used to identify desired conditions for both resources and visitor experiences for

different areas. They also identify kinds and levels of management, visitor use and development that it would take to achieve the unit's desired conditions. Units were identified that have a basis in the National Area's purpose, legislation, resources, public interest and other concerns. The alternatives contain different applications of the management units in response to an alternative concept.

Management units do not identify specific sites or facilities, which according to NPS procedures are planned and evaluated in later studies when the need arises and funding is provided. It is important to point out that the General Management Plan by itself does not bring any additional funding to the National Area. Additional funding comes only through specific requests for specific purposes.

The three types of management units applied are described below.

Primitive Recreation Unit

Desired resource conditions and setting

Natural resources in this unit would be carefully protected from degradation. Generally, the unit would exhibit the free play of natural forces and there would be only necessary and minimal interference with natural ecosystem succession. Significant cultural resources would be preserved, including those listed or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Desired visitor experience

Visitors would explore extensive natural areas in a primitive setting essentially free from conveniences and facilities. Visiting historical sites would be an objective for some and incidental for others. Visitors would access the unit by hiking, riding horses, or floating the river. Solitude and natural quiet would be important to the experience, and visitors would feel removed from the modern developed world. The experience would be one of independence, having a moderate to high challenge, and a need for some individual outdoor skills. A moderate to high time commitment would usually be involved.

Kinds/levels of management

A sustained management effort would be necessary to promote the long-term integrity of cultural resources and natural ecosystems. Monitoring resource conditions

and taking corrective actions would be required since the tolerance for change is very low. Where practical and consistent with policy, efforts would be made to restore attributes of the resource or system to an identified pre-impact condition. Visitor safety awareness would be more intense because of the remoteness of much of the unit. A moderately high level of maintenance would be necessary for repairing and maintaining trails and cemetery and administrative access roads. Information and orientation would include preparing visitors for a primitive-type experience and would be provided to visitors prior to their arrival in this unit, such as at visitor contact stations and at parking area bulletin boards in adjacent units. Other interpretive services may be provided. Limitations on use may be appropriate at some point to protect resources and the visitor experience.

Kinds/levels of visitor use

River uses and trail uses would be the predominant activity types throughout the unit generally. Camping by backpack or pack horse would be available. Hunting would occur in season. Motor vehicles would not be permitted. Once away from points of congregation, visitors would experience little interaction with others outside of one's own group.

Kinds/levels of development

Trails and necessary related structures, e.g., bridges, would be the only present-day recreation facilities provided in this unit. They would be modest in character, carefully blending resource protection and visitor experience objectives. High-density trail networks such as short loop systems would not be found in this unit. Trailheads would be located in adjacent units. Locations may be designated for primitive camping if necessary to protect resources.

Backwoods Recreation Unit

Desired resource conditions and setting

The unit would exhibit a predominantly natural condition and appearance. Minor changes would be accepted for the low level of development appropriate for this unit. Significant cultural resources would be preserved.

Desired visitor experience

Away from points of congregation, such as roads, parking areas, and trailheads, visitors would be in a natural setting free from most modern facilities and

conveniences. Most visitors would sense that they are in an “undeveloped” area and have left behind the familiar. Solitude and natural quiet would be available in most locations of this unit. There would be a broad range of challenge, physical exertion, and outdoor skill involved depending on one’s activity. A moderate time commitment would be typical. For many visitors, this unit would be the passageway to their destination, the gorge. Thus, the unit would serve as a transition zone preparing them for a primitive experience.

Kinds/levels of management

A moderate to low level of management would be anticipated for achieving the desired conditions of resources and visitor experience. This would include taking any corrective actions and for providing visitor safety and resource protection. On-site orientation/information would occur at parking area bulletin boards.

Kinds/levels of visitor use

Trail uses would predominate. Motor vehicle use would be primarily for access to trails and secondarily for sight-seeing and driving for pleasure. Road conditions may require high-clearance vehicles at certain times and locations. Off-road vehicle use would occur on designated routes that have specific destinations and purposes related to the resources of the National Area. Hunting would occur in season. Camping would be available at designated areas and may be managed through a permit system. Encounters with other visitors would not be unusual.

Kinds/levels of development

Roads would generally be unpaved and the minimum necessary for resource protection reasons. Parking and trailheads would be clearly marked and physically controlled. Trails would be of the connector and through-trail kinds and modest in character. Limited rest room facilities may be provided. All facilities would harmonize with the natural scene. Camping areas would be small and unimproved. Facility construction would avoid sensitive resources, involve the least possible modification of the facility site, and include measures to minimize impact on resources and the visitor experience.

Enhanced Recreation Unit

Desired resource conditions and setting

Resource conditions and appearance would be predominantly natural and basic processes would be

intact. Changes to accommodate visitor and administrative needs would be accepted in areas environmentally suitable for development. Significant cultural resources would be preserved. Specific facility planning and mitigation would avoid sensitive resources and minimize impacts.

Desired visitor experience

Generally, the visitor experience in this unit would be made user-friendly by facility enhancements. Most visitors would use this unit as their entrance into and initial experience in the National Area. Visitors would have a feeling of being in a natural setting but provided with conveniences. There would be easy access to a number of points of interest. A large number of visitors would be participating in a wide range of activities. Compared to other units, this unit would offer visitors a fairly structured experience supported with specific facilities. Interaction with others would be common and expected, particularly at focal points, such as overlooks, campgrounds, information stations, river accesses, and trailheads. The background environment would offer some opportunities for experiences similar to the other unit types, such as hiking and horseback riding. Signs and other information sources would inform visitors of trails and other facilities. The necessary levels of exertion, skill and challenge would vary greatly, depending on the activity.

Kinds/levels of management

An intensive level of management would be required to minimize, mitigate, and monitor resource impacts and ensure visitor safety. Facilities would be concentrated within the unit at specific, selected locations, and management intensity would be greatest at these locations. On-site media for orientation and education, including most personal services, would be concentrated in this unit.

Kinds/levels of visitor use

Visitors would be participating in a wide range of resource-compatible activities. Different locations of this unit would be suitable for different uses. Driving/sight-seeing, viewing from overlooks, hiking, horseback riding, river access, and camping would be predominant activities. Others would include bicycling, picnicking, nature and history learning, and ORV use on designated routes having specific resource-related destinations and purposes. Hunting would occur in season. The

	Primitive Recreation Unit	Backwoods Recreation Unit	Enhanced Recreation Unit
Resource conditions / setting	Essentially all natural; preserved cultural sites	Predominantly natural; preserved cultural sites	Natural setting modified for development; preserved cultural sites
Visitor experience orientation	Self-reliant resource based recreation with moderate to high level of personal challenge	Resource-based recreation with minimal level of conveniences	Resource-based recreation with user-friendly facilities
Principal activities	Hiking, horseback riding, river use, primitive camping	Hiking, horseback riding, river and lake use, primitive camping	Driving/sightseeing, hiking, horseback riding, river access, camping
Hunting	Yes - no vehicles	Yes - vehicles allowed on designated routes	Yes - vehicles allowed on designated routes
Visitor education, interpretation, orientation	Generally off-unit	On-and off-unit	On-unit; most personal services in this unit
Interaction/encounter rate with others	Very occasional; possibly none	Occasional; somewhat expected	Frequent; expected
Management effort to achieve and maintain unit conditions	Intensive; resource protection focus	Moderate; visitor management focus	Intensive; visitor management focus
General facility types	Trails, primitive camping areas	Trails, unpaved roads, primitive camping areas	Trails, paved roads, visitor information, overlooks, improved campgrounds
Trails	Dispersed network; modest, although portions may be hardened for resource protection	Connector trail; modest, although portions may be hardened for resource protection	Connector trails; short loop systems, convenient trail heads; may be built to sustain heavy use
Off-road motor vehicle use	None	Vehicles allowed on designated routes	Vehicles allowed on designated routes
Roads	One-lane, graveled; not for recreational use	Usually two-lane, graveled	Usually two-lane, paved

Table 1 – Comparison of Management Unit Highlights

probability of visitors encountering others would be moderate to high.

Kinds/levels of development:

With most of the National Area's facilities, this unit in its many locations would serve most visitors as a staging area for venturing into the other, less developed units. While paved and unpaved roads, and associated parking, would provide safe and efficient travel, they would not be intended for fast and convenient transportation. There may be paved walkways and improved overlooks. Trails would include short loop trails in some locations and may be built to heavy-use standards. Maximum size of new campgrounds would be similar to Blue Heron Campground, which has approximately 50 improved sites. Administrative support buildings/areas would be located in this unit. Infrastructure development would respond to visitor use needs and trends while remaining in harmony with the surrounding environment. Development other than trails and overlooks would be located a suitable and substantial distance from any boundary shared with the primitive recreation unit in order to minimize the potential effects of intrusive sights and sounds.

Alternatives

Alternatives A and B as well as the No-Action Alternative are discussed here. In the case of the National Area, the No-Action Alternative represents current management and resource conditions for comparison purposes. By itself, it is not an alternative that can be selected, or implemented, because it does not include the management unit approach required by NPS policy. A key purpose of this planning effort is to apply the management unit approach to the National Area, and this is reflected in Alternatives A and B.

This discussion includes maps of where the management units have been applied to the National Area for Alternatives A and B. The reasoning for the unit applications is presented, along with how this would relate to current conditions.

The No-Action alternative is discussed first.

No-Action Alternative (Current Conditions)

Current Resource Conditions

The National Area is generally recovering to a natural condition and setting, having endured extensive logging

and mining. Old growth trees exist only in isolated groves in relatively inaccessible places. Nevertheless, the area's forested, rugged topography provides outstanding scenery, mainly focused in the gorge. The waters within the National Area are generally of good quality but still suffer from undesirable impacts by past and present land use practices inside and outside the area, including mining and forestry. Past uses of what is now the National Area provide many significant cultural resources. Most of the prehistoric sites have been looted. Many historic structures have been lost and vegetative succession is taking over the old landscapes.

Current Visitor Experience

Visitors generally drive to various destinations within the National Area, such as campgrounds, overlooks, and trailheads. From these, many visitors venture out on foot, horseback or canoe to experience the area. Many come in family or other groups and some come alone. Within the gorge, and away from the road access points, the experience is one of getting away from modern conveniences and enjoying the sights and sounds of a natural scene. On the plateau, it can be much like this also, except one is more aware of the potential for seeing or hearing familiar things. While some resources are readily available and interpreted to visitors, many others are in more remote locations and not easily accessed.

Current Management

As a rather new NPS area, the National Area is still in the process of achieving anything close to optimum levels of staffing, and as a consequence, the level of management needed and desired by the staff is considerably higher than what can be achieved. Much of National Area management is reacting to resource issues, attempting to understand and correct past and ongoing impacts to streams, sensitive species, and cultural resources. A significant effort is also being placed on managing visitor use in order to provide adequate opportunities and avoid and mitigate impacts on resources, including conducting needed compliance documentation. Attempting to maintain the very large facility inventory is a considerable effort and expense. Visitor protection is a constant challenge for the small staff, faced with increasing use and such a large area, much of it relatively inaccessible. The legislative provision for continuing oil and gas development on the plateau adds further complexity to attempts at effective and efficient management.

Other than general law and policy, National Area personnel are guided currently by the legislation, with its distinction between the gorge and the plateau, or the “adjacent area.” A considerable effort is expended on implementing congressional direction regarding limitations on gorge use. A plan prepared by the US Army Corps of Engineers prior to NPS administration has been useful. Beyond the distinction between the gorge and the plateau, and the application of general NPS policy, National Area staff lacks approved guidance concerning where to direct use and development.

Current Use

Visitor use is naturally concentrated around transportation corridors and particularly points of interest that provide parking. Once outside their vehicles, visitors frequently walk to attractions, backpack, ride horses, float the river, fish, and hunt in season. Considerable use is made of the trails, which generally disperse use throughout the National Area. In places, the current trail network results in concentrations of people, or people and horses, which have adverse impacts on the trails and their immediate environments. Trail erosion has resulted in elevated stream sedimentation loads. Use also occurs on previously existing roads and trails that are not part of the National Area’s officially designated system. Use of these routes, which includes some illegal uses, puts added strain on National Area personnel to effectively manage resources and provide for visitor safety.

Current Development

The gorge is essentially natural apart from the legislative road access routes. Away from these accesses, trails are the only visitor use facilities, other than the Charit Creek lodge. A few of the gorge accesses provide convenient visitor facilities beyond simply river access, and one, Blue Heron, offers a premier interpretive attraction. The plateau has the campgrounds, overlooks, trailheads and other parking, information stations, as well as roads and trails and administrative facilities. Private oil and gas facilities, e.g., pumps, tanks, and pipelines, are found in many areas, with concentrations in certain places. There are many roads and trails that existed prior to National Area establishment, built and used for a variety of reasons, including logging, which are not officially recognized by NPS. Pressures for additional trail development exist and have resulted in some questionable locations considering management effectiveness and resource protection. These have

occurred without benefit of an internal trail policy. Roadwork has also occurred without such policy guidance, which has raised consistency questions. Discussions have occurred with the nearby communities concerning the types and levels of development that are appropriate within the National Area.

Alternative A

(Note: For a full description of both Alternatives A and B, the following general discussion needs to be combined with the list of selected development areas immediately following the discussion of Alternative B.)

Primitive Recreation Unit Application (Management for this and the other two units has been previously described.)

The primitive recreation management unit is the same as the “gorge” as defined by the legislation establishing the National Area, except for the gorge access routes also identified by the legislation. Congress specifically distinguished the gorge from the rest of the National Area and prescribed more protective measures for this area it referred to as a “unique natural scenic resource.” The establishing legislation is clearly the basis for this management unit that contains most of the National Area’s unique and sensitive resources. Since establishment, the gorge has been managed differently from the rest of the area and most nearby residents and many other visitors have come to understand this difference.

Away from the gorge access routes, the gorge is largely regaining a near-primitive condition. Large areas are recovering from the earlier effects of logging and mining. This general recovery of the landscape is entirely consistent in this unit. Cultural resources associated with stream valley homesteads are blending with the natural scene; however, there are significant structures and landscapes having integrity that warrant preservation and interpretation and whose specific management would be addressed in later plans. Any open fields not associated with these cultural resources would be allowed to naturally return to forest.

Some trails and roads that existed before establishment of the National Area are still being used as trails, but they are not part of the National Area’s official trail system. Some of these are eroding and causing resource damage because they were located where topography, soils, drainage, or other factors are not suitable for trail

development. Where this is occurring, the area would be rehabilitated. Routes that would not be included as part of an official trail system would be closed and allowed to grow over. Exceptions may be made for historical routes eligible for the National Register—here and in the other management units. Additions, deletions, rehabilitation and other changes to the official trail network would be the subject of the Roads and Trails Management Plan under preparation. It is anticipated that some new trails or trail segments would be added to the system and certain segments that are causing problems would be deleted or changed.

In addition to the congressionally identified roads, there are other legal roads within the gorge, including county-owned rights-of-way, cemetery access and those necessary for administration. These routes will be addressed in the Roads and Trails Management Plan in the context of their location in the primitive recreation unit.

Enhanced Recreation Unit Application

In this alternative, the enhanced recreation management unit would be applied to areas of the plateau (the “adjacent area”) around already existing developments. Six of the gorge access routes would also be included in this unit category. These are Highway 92, County Road 1363 near Yamacraw, the road to Blue Heron mine, Highway 297, Zenith road, and Highway 52.

The plateau in general, like the gorge, is recovering from past uses, particularly logging. This general vegetative recovery, including forest, open grassy woodlands, and native grassy openings, would be consistent in this unit. Fire management as a tool for managing vegetation to achieve desired conditions would be applied in this and other units as determined by special planning. Selected cultural resources in these areas are being preserved and made available for visitor enjoyment and education, such as the Oscar Blevins farmstead. Preserving and interpreting significant representative resources would be fully consistent in this unit. Some sites await decisions on their ultimate treatment, which will come with later planning, but additional opportunities for interpretation to visitors would further management objectives in this unit.

Scattered throughout the plateau are numerous open spaces that represent historic fields no longer in use. Some are succeeding to forest while others are maintained for various reasons. A Cultural Landscape Report is needed that assesses their historic significance

and addresses management issues. Retention of these fields would be appropriate when related to visitor use needs and interpretation of cultural resource associations.

As in the gorge, there are old roads and trails on the plateau that are not part of officially designated networks. These routes do not receive maintenance and, in places, contribute to resource damage. Some routes would likely be included in the designated trail system if they satisfy criteria for inclusion, which would be identified in future trails planning. Such criteria would include consideration of location, contribution to the larger trail network, avoidance of sensitive resources, and impacts—positive and negative—on visitors. Those routes not meeting the criteria would be closed to further use.

Some of the designated areas are considerably larger than the development that currently exists. This is intended to allow for carefully planned expansion consistent with the alternative and management unit direction. The areas are not meant to be completely developed. Rather, they would offer a large enough area to permit the evaluation of alternative locations of needed future facilities.

Backwoods Recreation Unit Application

This management unit would include the remaining areas of the plateau (“adjacent area”) not designated as enhanced recreation unit. These areas would be located throughout the National Area and in many of the larger areas would offer significant recreation opportunity for activities not dependent on facility conveniences. This unit would also include the remaining five gorge accesses, i.e., Peter’s Bridge, Burnt Mill Bridge, Station Camp, Worley, and Alum Ford. (Alum Ford is not within the gorge as defined by Congress but is mentioned in the legislation.)

A general vegetative recovery, including forest, open grassy woodlands, and native grassy openings, would be consistent in this unit. As in the enhanced recreation unit, open spaces representing historic fields are succeeding to forest or are maintained for various purposes. A Cultural Landscape Report and resulting management decisions covering the issue of historic fields for the enhanced recreation unit would address the issue in this unit as well.

Extensive changes would appear unnecessary in order to achieve desired conditions.

Consistent with the unit also would be the preservation and interpretation of significant cultural resources as may be identified in future investigations. As in the other two units, there are old roads and trails on the plateau that are not part of officially designated networks. Changes to the existing roads and trails would be likely when the new official networks are identified during later facility planning as mentioned under the enhanced recreation unit.

Oil and gas well concentrations are found mainly in this unit and mostly in the southern part of the National Area. The oil and gas inventory underway by the National Area will identify safety and resource issues surrounding these facilities and allow management to determine how these areas can be made as compatible as possible with management unit objectives.

Alternative B

Alternative B applies the same three management units discussed under Alternative A in many of the same areas. However, an important difference between Alternatives A and B is that a larger portion of the plateau (“adjacent area”) would be designated enhanced recreation unit. Eight gorge accesses would also be designated enhanced recreation unit and include Alum Ford, Highway 92, County Road 1363 near Yamacraw, Blue Heron road, Station Camp road, Highway 297, Zenith road, and Highway 52.

The backwoods recreation unit would be the remaining area of the plateau. The remaining three gorge accesses would also be designated backwoods recreation unit and are Peter’s Bridge, Burnt Mill Bridge, and Worley. As in Alternative A, the primitive recreation unit would be the legislatively defined gorge.

Enhanced recreation unit locations would be focused around existing development, as in Alternative A, and would also be in areas considered suitable for potential future use and development. Suitability factors included accessibility to roads, past and present recreation and other uses, proximity to existing or expected development outside the National Area, and reasonable extensions of internal development areas.

Application of Alternatives A and B to Selected Areas

The following indicates reasonably foreseeable development-oriented actions in various locations of the

National Area over the next 15 years. Listed actions would be subject to more detailed planning and environmental analysis prior to implementation. This would allow consideration of relevant future conditions, engineering feasibility, and environmental acceptability.

Yahoo Falls area

Both alternatives: Continue present uses for picnicking and hiking/sight-seeing; improve entrance road.

Alum Ford

Alternative A: Continue boat access and primitive camping.

Alternative B: Continue boat access, improve/expand boat ramp and parking, upgrade/expand camping opportunity, new picnic area.

Yamacraw/Highway 92

Both alternatives: Improve existing boat access, improve picnic area on east side of river.

Worley

Both alternatives: Continue river access, improve parking and picnicking opportunity.

Blue Heron

Both alternatives: Continue preservation and interpretation of mine and town site, continue sight-seeing train opportunity, continue overlook opportunities on both sides of river, continue road access to Barthell, continue campground.

Bear Creek area

Both alternatives: Improve road access (coordinate with county, pave one-way/one-lane loop, two-way/two-lane to horse camp spur), continue equestrian camping, trailheads, overlook, new connector horse/hiking trail, plus...

Alternative A: Expand equestrian camping, improvements to other existing facilities.

Alternative B: Same as A, plus developed family campground and associated loop and connecting trails, camp store, interpretive media, picnic area.



Little Bill Slaven Road/trailhead

Both alternatives: Continue trailhead access.

Station Camp area

Alternative A: Expand equestrian camping, improve road to river with pullouts.

Alternative B: Same as A, plus pave circulation roads, pave road to river for passenger vehicles only, new picnic area near river.

Roads and trails (generally)

Both alternatives: Generally continue road and trail access subject to review of existing routes according to criteria addressing resource protection, visitor experience of users and other visitors, visitor protection and safety, and maintenance capability. Specific uses would occur only on routes designated for those uses as identified in the roads and trails plan. That plan also would identify maintenance standards as well as construction standards for any proposed new trails.

Divide Road to intersection with Bell Farm Road, and Twin Arches Road

Alternative A: Selected safety improvements, rehabilitate existing trailheads.

Alternative B: Same as A, plus improve entire length to higher standard including paving.

Charit Creek Lodge

Both alternatives: Continue existing uses; allow improvements within a determined ecological and recreational carrying capacity and consistent with the historic scene—pursuant to National Area legislation—and a commercial use plan.

Bandy Creek/Highway 297 area west of river

Both alternatives: Continue campgrounds, stable, day uses, visitor contact, trails/trailheads, historic preservation/interpretation, administrative functions, access roads; add developed picnic area(s), new loop trails/trailheads, and overlooks, plus...

Alternative A: New visitor center.

Alternative B: New visitor center having more educational and office space.

Leatherwood Ford and Highway 297 area east of river

Both alternatives: Continue river access and associated facilities, trails/trailheads, and administrative functions; new overlook and approach road/parking and new museum storage facility.

O&W railbed

Both alternatives: East of O&W bridge—Continue passenger vehicle access on county right-of-way; minor improvements to roadbed for visitor safety and resource protection, improve trailheads and river access, evaluate and mitigate resource impacts. West of O&W bridge—identify appropriate uses in roads and trails plan, evaluate and address existing and potential resource impacts.

Airport Road/confluence area

Alternative A: Improve river access trail, improve approach road (coordinate with county), improve parking.

Alternative B: Same as A, plus new overlook and picnic area.

River craft launch sites outside National Area (Highway 27/New River and Highway 52/White Oak Creek)

Both alternatives: Continue river access; coordinate improvements with Tennessee Departments of Transportation and Conservation.

Burnt Mill Bridge

Both alternatives: Continue river access.

Honey Creek Overlook

Both alternatives: Continue access to overlook and trails.

Mt. Helen Road area

Alternative A: New primitive camping area, trailhead, and multiple-use trails.

Alternative B: Same as A, except developed campground.

Areas of oil & gas wells (generally)

Both alternatives: Through applicable regulations and surveys such as the oil and gas inventory, address

needs for resource protection and appropriate visitor uses while maintaining legal mineral rights.

Clear Creek corridor

Both alternatives: Extend John Muir hiking trail to Peters Bridge.

Joe Branch

Alternative A: Continue picnicking and existing uses.

Alternative B: Same as A, plus trail development.

Rugby area

Both alternatives: Continue trail access and coordination on interpretation; add hiking trail linkage to extension of John Muir trail, new developed family campground and associated loop trail system, new district office/administrative functions.

Brewster Bridge/Highway 52

Both alternatives: Continue river access; improve picnicking.

Peters Bridge

Both alternatives: Continue river access and picnicking; improve parking for river access and Muir trail trailhead.

Zenith

Both alternatives: Continue access; address safety and resource protection needs, improve crossing of Ice Camp Branch, plus...

Alternative A: Interpretation of townsite, small picnic area.

Alternative B: Expanded interpretation of townsite, interpretive trail, picnic area.

Darrow Ridge area

Alternative A: Address needed improvements to selected existing road access, new trailhead, and trails.

Alternative B: Same as A, plus additional trails, trailheads, and overlooks.

Visitor contact outside of National Area

Both alternatives: Continue contact at Stearns (consider partnership with Forest Service); investigate potential partnerships in Huntsville and Jamestown areas.

Cost Considerations

Costs associated with the above development-related actions would be incurred according to specific needs and fund availability. Total construction cost for all identified Alternative A actions is approximately \$20,200,000. Total cost for the Alternative B actions would approximate \$34,500,000. These figures do not include certain other costs related to additional existing road rehabilitation projects, oil and gas area rehabilitation, and other trail projects that may be identified in later planning. Costs of various needed visitor and resource surveys and studies are also not included. These would be identified in other program documents. These undefined costs are not related to any one alternative; for example, the repair of the road to Blue Heron mine, which would be included in either alternative. The total construction costs by alternative are shown by site in the appendix.

Total recurring administration costs would be increased with either alternative. Costs associated with Alternative A would be approximately \$4,743,000. Alternative B costs would approximate \$4,976,000. Currently identified equipment needs total \$623,000 for Alternative A and \$693,000 for Alternative B.

Traditional means to implement the selected alternative involve funding through congressional appropriations. Grants could supplement normal funding. Additional assistance from partnership programs and volunteer efforts would be encouraged. Greater clarity and understanding of management goals should lead to broadening the opportunity for partnerships and volunteers, and the expansion of the roles and number of partners could augment donations of supplies, material, equipment, and research to the National Area.

Other Alternatives Considered

Destination Alternative Concept

This was one of three preliminary alternatives considered by the NPS planning team and presented to the public. Its distinctive feature was the base camp management unit, which would allow the development of modern

facilities and conveniences, including lodges and large improved campgrounds. These units would be destinations in themselves set amidst the natural backdrop of the National Area. Only a few who commented thought this type of development was desirable. Most wanted to retain the naturalness of the National Area and allow these types of facilities to be provided by the private sector in surrounding communities. Even if thought desirable, such a high development level would be very difficult if not impossible for NPS to implement in view of the cost.

Other Management Unit Alternatives

Besides the base camp unit mentioned above, there was a change made in another management unit type and a change made in the application of all the units.

A high opportunity unit was used in the preliminary alternatives presentation. This unit would allow a fairly high degree of use and development that those who commented generally believed was inappropriate to the character of the National Area or was being provided in too many places. While some others saw the unit as acceptable, the unit was deleted from further consideration and the enhanced recreation unit was added, which still would provide conveniences but not to the same degree.

A significant change was also made in the application of the remaining units. The primitive recreation unit was applied to only the gorge as Congress defined it. Congress had already indicated the gorge should be managed essentially as a primitive area, and most that commented understood and accepted this. With this application of the primitive recreation unit, the other units were applied only to the plateau, or the “adjacent area” as also defined in the legislation.

Other Concerns

Some who commented wanted NPS to allow motor vehicles in the gorge so they could reach areas used prior to National Area establishment. If this were legally permissible, it would have set up the possibility of different management units. However, Congress specifically prohibited motor vehicles in the gorge for recreation except in designated access corridors.

Some people have said that the plan prepared by the US Army Corps of Engineers should be followed. Indeed, this plan was followed for the development of many of

the current facilities. It contains a great deal of information and has been very useful for certain issues. It likely will continue to be referenced as specific issues are evaluated. However, the plan is almost 20 years old and there is a need to revisit basic issues of resource management and visitor use and to do this in the NPS planning framework.

The subject of designating wilderness was raised during early public involvement. Evaluating the suitability of some of the National Area for wilderness is beyond the scope of this broad-framework general management plan. On one hand, there is some question of having designated wilderness in a National Recreation Area even though the area is also a National River. On the other hand, it could be said there is sufficient area just within the gorge for such a designation. Any such evaluation would be a future consideration.

Summary Comparison of Alternatives

There are some important distinctions between the alternatives as well as important similarities. These are highlighted here in narrative form and in the following tables.

- The primitive recreation management unit and the legislatively defined gorge are the same in Alternatives A and B. A key difference between these two alternatives lies in the proportion and distribution of the other two management units on the plateau.
- Although there are more enhanced recreation units in Alternative B, they include the same enhanced recreation units in Alternative A.
- The enhanced recreation units in either action alternative would serve essentially as “land banks” for virtually all future development. Subsequent, detailed planning would determine exactly where and how such development would occur, consistent with the alternative concept and the unit prescription.
- A difference between the action alternatives and the no-action alternative would be the distribution of future use and development. Under both action alternatives, use and development would be concentrated into pre-selected areas.
- Alternative B would allow the highest level of use and development. It is important to note that this is a potential situation that depends on future visitor use levels and funding capability.

The summary tables that follow include various elements of the alternatives and their environmental consequences. These tables are not to be relied upon apart from the discussions in the text. The full discussion of the consequences is found in the consequences section. A comparison of the three management units was provided previously.

Element	No Action Included for comparison purposes only	Alternative A	Alternative B
Concept	No formal concept. Current management	Rustic and natural. Conveniences available in selected areas	Variety of recreation opportunities. Conveniences available in many areas
Management Units applied	Gorge and plateau, per legislation	Primitive recreation, backwoods recreation, and enhanced recreation	Primitive recreation, backwoods recreation, and enhanced recreation
Primitive Recreation Unit application	N/A	Legislatively defined gorge	Legislatively defined gorge
Backwoods Recreation Unit application	N/A	75% of plateau	65% of plateau
Enhanced Recreation Unit application	N/A	20% of plateau. Scott SF = 5% of plateau	30% of plateau. Scott SF = 5% of plateau
Potential for additional development and use?	Yes, essentially undefined	Yes, defined by management unit	Yes, defined by management unit. More than "A"
Distribution of additional development and use	Case-by-case, based on gorge/plateau division	Guided by management units	Guided by management units
Development and use limits	Addressed by legislation only	Addressed by legislation and management unit prescriptions	Addressed by legislation and management unit prescriptions

Table 2 – Summary of Alternative Elements

Consequences on	No Action	Alternative A	Alternative B
Long term integrity of natural systems	Resources threatened by uses inside and outside National Area. Specific projects provide benefits	Still threatened, but greater potential benefit from more focused strategic management	Still threatened and higher levels of use and specific impact, but more strategic management would benefit natural system integrity
Long term integrity of cultural systems	Resources threatened. Specific projects provide benefits	Still threatened, but greater potential benefit from more focused strategic management	Still threatened and higher levels of use and specific impact, but more strategic management would benefit natural system integrity
Visitor experience and access to National Area resources	Adequate to many key resources but quality is being compromised	Enhancement through comprehensive strategies; additional development in several areas but considered rustic as a whole	Enhancement through comprehensive strategies; additional development in several areas (more than "A"); more emphasis on recreation activity
Public understanding of National Area resources and management	Growing understanding, but significant misunderstandings and disagreements remain	Higher potential for understanding through better definition of area management	Same as "A"
Economic contribution to the surrounding region	Some benefits, but less than communities expect	More sustainable levels of visitors / benefits through more realistic expectations coming from sharing of more focused long term goals	Same as "A", but higher potential
Consistency with the plans of others	Continuing confusion, except in some specific instances	Clearer direction would provide greater consistency. Alternative is generally consistent with known goals	Same as "A"
Development sites	No additional development (status quo)	Development actions would potentially have minor direct and indirect effects on soils, vegetation, wildlife, water quality, air quality and cultural resources.	Same as "A", but potentially more area affected by facility development

Table 3 – Summary of Alternative Consequences

